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AUTHOR Lehane, Stephen; Goldman, Richard
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an experimental Bachelor of Arts program at Kent State University which is tailored to recognize field accomplishments and, at the same time, to meet the special needs of experienced early childhood workers. The program is designed for individuals who have had minimal exposure to higher education due to economic hardship. The proposed program consists of three phases: (1) outstanding individuals will be awarded sophomore standing in the baccalaureate program on the basis of their demonstrated talent in the field; (2) two years of university-sponsored correspondence work will be completed by each student under the direction of a qualified supervisor already operating within the individual's locale; and (3) a residency of a year (or some portion of a year) will be completed on a university campus. The steps in the development of the program at Kent State are described and future plans for further implementation are discussed. (JMB)

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Building the Steps of the Career Ladder

By: Stephen Lehane
Richard Goldman
Department of Early Childhood Education
Kent State University

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In many educational projects, like Head Start, Follow Through, and government sponsored day care, positions of high responsibility normally requiring B.A. and M.A. personnel have been filled quite competently by people without such degrees. These people often occupied professional level positions without receiving the salary and status usually commensurate with their roles; they lack the "union card" - the college degree. With the War on Poverty winding down such individuals seem headed for a dismal future because their lack of a degree precludes them from competing with college graduates for school system positions - positions for which they have a proven competency. Admittedly, they have alternatives, either to return to their original non-school jobs or to enroll in college. Returning to an old job would most likely be personally demeaning, to say nothing of a terrible waste of proven and developed talent. Enrolling in college as a freshman would seem both threatening and equally demeaning since these worldly and experienced people would be subject to the same expectations held by universities for their relatively naive and sheltered students.

Nobody wants the universities, foundations or the government to create jobs. What is being asked is that the institution, like the university which provided much of the initial opportunity for releasing this human potential via positions in various projects, now provide the impetus for creating innovative undergraduate courses of study which would recognize field accomplishments while also tailoring the traditional B.A. program to meet the current needs of these special students (like trying to support a family and attend school at the same time).

Essentially what is being requested is that individuals who have demonstrated exceptional talent in the field be awarded a "field commission" in

terms of being promoted to sophomore standing within a baccalaureate program. And, also, that the remaining requirements of the program entail two years of university sponsored correspondence work to be completed under the direction of a qualified supervisor already operating within the individual's locale. The final phase of this baccalaureate will be a residency stint consisting of a year or some portion of a year to be spent on the University campus.

Participants in this program will be selected nationally and will be known as Field Commissioned Educators or FCEs. Since the War on Poverty knew no regional boundaries, than neither should a program designed to benefit poverty workers have such boundaries. If a university chooses to subsidize this proposal, then it will be in the vanguard among universities who are now beginning to recognize their domains in terms of problems and not regions. Presently there are approximately 50 universities like Syracuse, Minnesota, and Sarah Lawrence offering innovative, off campus, undergraduate B.A. programs for adults. When universities of this caliber become involved in off-campus work, then one can be assured that it is possible to fashion correspondence courses of integrity and rigor sufficient to dispel any concerns regarding the quality of such courses. What would justify and distinguish the development of the FCE program is its focus on the less affluent members of society. This is in contrast to most of the current off-campus projects which seem to be oriented to members of the middle class. In the case of these schools, quality was relatively easy to maintain since they mainly dealt with it collegians whose educational careers had been interrupted. What justifies and distinguishes Kent's program is its focus on individuals who have had minimal exposure to higher education usually due to economic hardships.

In designing a program for such students two issues emerged: (1) could the students meet the expectations of college level work; and (2) could we create courses geared to their special learning needs without jeopardizing quality? In short, we wanted to test the students while testing our ability to provide for them.

Our first step in attempting to meet these issues involved the development of a unique workshop. It consisted of five meetings: four of these entailed all day Saturday sessions on campus; the fifth meeting was planned after the students had the opportunity to work on correspondence assignments for six weeks. Our first students were 15 day care workers representing private and public centers. As anticipated, most had a high school diploma. However, more impressive were their real world credentials: one woman under 30 had from scratch financed and organized her own preschool valued today at more than quarter of a million dollars. Others had outstanding records in political, charitable, and civic endeavors.

The design of the course included a series of lectures and seminars covering learning environments, discipline and guidance, principles of early childhood curriculum, current trends in social studies, music-movement, reading and language arts. Each class was conducted by a specialist in the particular subject area who also evaluated each of the students. By the fourth session we had six different evaluations on each student. Aside from formal class performance, these evaluations were constructed to reveal the preferred learning mode of each student.

For example some students had to have their learning activities "programmed." They operated from a mode requiring both goals and procedures to be spelled out. While others functioned from a different mode needing only the goals

specified. Often we found students adept at applying their course content to real situations and still others who were more proficient at taking exams and completing term papers.

These are just a few of the modes we experienced. In each instance initial assignments were geared to the students preferred mode. However, as the course progressed, each student was gradually required to demonstrate a level of competence in all modes. This was the key to our program. Rather than giving a student a watered down version of a college course, we could now convert the course content into the preferred learning mode of each student. Thus we built on the students strengths while assuring the quality of our courses.

The second step is a critical stage in the development of our field centered program. We proved to ourselves and the students in step 1 that we can offer courses of quality level which has the ratio of 2/3 work off-campus and 1/3 on-campus. We concluded from our assessment of their work that our written feedback affected the quality of work from all of the participants. After sharing these data with our department chairperson and dean, we received the "OK" to offer one of our regular course offerings, Child Study, on an external basis to day care workers.

We have decided to bring about change as a slow, deliberate process. For example, we have not thrown out the on-campus courses with their accompanying objectives as being irrelevant - we feel they have much relevance. The irrelevancy comes in the style, time and location of the courses for professional educators who spend their day in the field. Since each course has a major emphasis of linking theory with practice, the courses for the day care workers are named Field Centered Courses (FCCs).

A FCC consists of a structured set of learning experiences which a student must master in order to receive university credit. The design of FCC is based on the following assumptions:

1. Each FCC has an equivalent course on-campus in the Early Childhood Education Department.
2. Each FCC has instructional objectives which are similar to the Early Childhood course objectives taught on campus.
3. Each FCC uses a variety of teaching-learning styles which match the unique learning styles of the students enrolled.
4. The student receives on-going feedback from a university teacher as he completes each unit of the FCC.
5. Each FCC encourages the student to use her own day care/nursery school site as the laboratory for developing the knowledge/skills in the FCC.

The learning process included in a FCC include: observations by the student in his/her own classroom; implementation of curricula material; assigned readings; information sent to the student on audio-tapes and educational television. The three year plan for design and implementation of FCC is:

1975-76 - Field Centered Course (FCC)
complete for:
Child Study (20163)
Planning for FCCs in:
History and Philosophy (40144)
Expressive Arts (30130)
Social Studies (30144)

1976-77 - FCCs complete for:
Child Study (20163)
History and Philosophy (40144)
Expressive Arts (30130)
Social Studies (30144)
Planning for FCCs in:
Discipline and Guidance (40151)
Nursery School Education (30164)
Education in the Kindergarten (47210)
Education in the Primary Grades (40140)

1977-78 - FCCs complete for:
Child Study (20163)
History and Philosophy (40144)

Expressive Arts (30130)
Social Studies (30144)
Discipline and Guidance (40151)
Nursery School Education (30164)
Education in the Kindergarten (47210)
Education in the Primary Grades (40140)

Step 4, the inclusion of courses from other departments in the FCC format, will begin with implementation of Step 3. We predict that instructors in other disciplines will contact us about our new format as they hear about the FCC in informal conversations, through reports in the mass media, and direct contacts from the FCC staff. This process has already begun with one department, Criminal Justice. Some faculty in this department feel that the FCC format may be applicable for full-time employed students such as policemen.

Steps 1 through 4 described above are either in the implementation or planning stages. Steps 5, 6 . . . . are in the fermentation stage. We want to share some of the future plans. One possibility is to have students receive work experience credit after they have completed at least one Field Centered Course. Our rationale is that the students may have a better understanding of how the university works and a clearer evaluation of their skills; we do not want a student to receive sophomore standing based on work experiences and then decide that college is not for her. Another possibility is to apply the "children teach children"* process of Gartner et. al. with beginning and experienced students enrolled in Field Centered Courses. Riessman** describes the goal of this process

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*See A. Gartner, M. Kohler and F. Riessman. Children Teach Children. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

**See F. Riessman. "The Helper-Therapy Principle," Social Work, X, 2 (1965).

> ...to find ways to transform recipients of help into dispensers of help, thus reversing the roles, and to structure the situation so that recipients of help will be placed in roles requiring the giving of assistance.

Other areas of exploration include: the use of the regional educational television station; the introduction of Field Centered Courses with prisoners; and the joint development of Field Centered Courses with welfare and educational institutions.